

The Conformists Reasons for bearing and joining with the Nonconformists.

1. **T**HE same Reasons which oblige Persons to hear and join with us, oblige us also to take all Opportunities of hearing and joining with the Nonconformists, they being Ministers of Christ, having due Call and Authority from him to preach the Gospel. The Church hath real need of their Labours, their Ministry is hated by Satan and Saint-hating Men; they are duly subject to the higher Powers, and are protected by the Law of the Land in the course of their Ministry, and are a considerable part of that same Church of *England*, which their present Majesties under God are Supream Governours of, according to the old Oath of Supremacy, and the 37th Article of the Church of *England*.

2. Those Words of our Saviour's take place here; *He that is not against us, is on our part*, Mark 9. 40. The Nonconformists really are not against us, therefore they are on our part. The Scope and Drift of their Ministry is to win Souls not to this or that Sect, but to Christ, to teach them their Duty to God, and to their present Majesties, as sole Supream under God, and the common Center of Catholick Unity in these Nations. They are truly tender of our Ministry, rejoice in our Labours, and in the Gifts and Graces of able and faithful Conformists, rebuke Backbiters and Vili-fiers of our Ministry; and as they have opportunity, hear and join with us and our Churches.

3. In the time of the late King *James* the Church of *England* did confess its Error in being severe to the Nonconformists. This is plain from a certain Pamphlet published in the late King's Reign, intituled, *A Letter to a Dissenter, upon occasion of his Majesties late gracious Declaration of Indulgence*. The Words thereof, pag. 8. are these following; *The Church of England convinced of its Error in being severe to you; the Parliament, whenever it meeteth, will sure be gentle to you: the next Heir bred in the Country, which you have so often quoted for a Pattern of Indulgence: A general Agreement of all thinking Men, that we must no more cut our selves off from the Protestants abroad, but rather enlarge the Foundations upon which we are to build our Defences against the common Enemy; so that in truth all things seem to conspire to give you Ease and Satisfaction, &c.* This is to be looked upon as the general sense of the conforming Nobility, Gentry, Commonalty, and Clergy in the time of the late King's Reign: for so really it was, as is well known. Now here

the Church of *England* doth confess its Error towards the Dissenters, and to have erred not in some slight and trivial Matters, but in Matters touching the Foundation; and sees a necessity of enlarging its Foundations, and consequently of taking in the Nonconformists, and making them constituent Parts of the Church with her self. Either then the Nonconformists are upon one and the same Foundation with our selves, or they deserve to be, and it is through no fault of theirs that they are not: being upon the same Foundation, we cannot be against their Ministry and Meetings; but we must needs be against our own, and overthrow the Common Protestant Cause, Religion, and Interest in this Nation, and consequently in all other Nations and Countries, what in us lies; and in being for their Ministry, we are for our own.

4. These Scriptures set together, prove it a Duty, viz. *Hear, and your Soul shall live, Isa. 55. 3. Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst of them, Mat. 18. 20. I charge thee before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, preach the Word, be instant in season, out of season, 2 Tim. 4. 1, 2. Though I be free from all Men, yet have I made my self Servant unto all, that I might gain the more: And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the Law as under the Law, that I might gain them that are under the Law; to them that are without Law, (being not without Law to God, but under the Law to Christ) that I might gain them that are without Law: To the Weak became I as weak, that I might gain the Weak. I am made all things to all Men, that I might by all means save some: And this I do for the Gospel's Sake, 1 Cor. 9. 19, 20, 21, 22, 23.*

5. The *Communion of Saints* is a principal Part of the Catechism, and of the common Creed of Christendom; it is a Fundamental in true Religion, most frequently repeated in all Conforming Congregations. Now we do not duly believe and practise this Fundamental, unless we hear and join with the Nonconforming Brethren in the Word, and Prayer, and Sacraments; as we have Call and Opportunity, they being visible Saints, and there being nothing in their way of Worship, but what is either laudable or tolerable: God doth own and approve their Ministry and Meetings, and is graciously present with them.

Objections Answered.

Obj. 1. The Presbyterian Ministers refuse Subjection to the Governours of the Church of *England*, and therefore it cannot be safe for us to hear and join with them. *Ans.* This is plainly not true: for under God their present Majesties are sole Supream Governours of the Church of *England*, ruling all Estates according to Laws enacted by common Consent in Parliament; witness the old Oath of Supremacy, and the 37th Article of the Church of *England*, in these words; *The King's Majesty hath the chief Pow-*

er in this Realm of England, and other his Dominions. Unto whom the chief Government of all Estates of this Realm, whether they be Ecclesiastical or Civil, in all Causes doth appertain, and is nor, nor ought to be subject to any foreign Jurisdiction. The Presbyterians generally subscribe this Article, and it is notorious that they are duly subject to their present Majesties, pray heartily for them, pay Taxes, bear all legal Charges, keep the stated monthly Fasts strictly and solemnly, and are more upright and cordial to the present Government than many of the Conformists are. If you deny their present Majesties to be chief Governours of the Church of England, you then bring in the Papacy, and unhinge the Government.

Obj. 2. Though the King be supream Governour by the Sword, yet Bishops are supream Governours of the Church of England by the Word. *Ans.* Bishops have no Authority but what is ministerial and subordinate, and therefore they cannot be supream Governours: they are under Law to God, and they are under Law to the King as God's Vicegerent. If you suppose them supream Governours of the Church of England, you suppose them Popes, that is, Antichristian Prelates, exalting themselves above God, and above the King his Vicegerent. *Abiathar* the High-Priest was not superior to, nor coordinate with King *Solomon*, but his Subject, and therefore for his Crime was justly deposed by him, and *Zadok* put in his room.

Obj. 3. The Presbyterian Ministers have not just and valid Ordination, as being ordained by meer Presbyters without a Bishop. *Ans.* God hath no where declared that there cannot be just and valid Ordination without a Bishop, and therefore the contrary Doctrine must needs be erroneous. Accordingly all true Protestants own and approve Ordination by Presbyters without a Bishop, (as is used in the Dutch, Helvetian, French, and *New-England-Churches*) to be just and valid, and not defective in any thing absolutely necessary. The Church of England doth not allow the Ordination of Presbyters by a Bishop only, without the presence and concurrence of co-assistant Presbyters, who do equally impose Hands with the Bishop: And the Presbyterians do not allow Ordination by all Presbyters promiscuously, but only by senior Presbyters, such as for their Age, Experience, Gravity, Wisdom, ministerial Ability and Fidelity, and exemplary Vertues, are Heads and chief Men among them, and a kind of Fathers to the younger Sort. The principal thing in a Minister of Christ is not external Ordination, but ministerial Ability and Fidelity; external Ordination is not principal but subservient: And where is ministerial Ability and Fidelity, with the consent and liking of the People, and the protection and countenance or permission of the Magistrate, with Imposition of Hands, and Fasting and Prayer by senior Presbyters of known Wisdom, Gravity, Piety, and exemplary Vertue and Ability; either this is

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just and valid Ordination, or there is no such thing as Ordination, neither can it be declared what it is. Now this is the Ordination in use among the Presbyterians. And indeed able and faithful Presbyters are, according to Scripture-phrafe, Bishops; *Acts* 20. 17. 28. *Phil.* 1. 1. 1 *Pet.* 5. 1.

Obj. 4. We who are conforming Ministers cannot hear and join with the Nonconformists without breach of our Oath of Canonical Obedience to the Ordinary. *Ans.* That Oath binds us but to obey the Ordinary in things lawful and honest: And to hear and join with the Nonconformists as we have opportunity, is neither against Law nor Honesty, but rather laudable, pleasing to God, profitable to the Soul, and the true way of Peace. The Ordinary is not supream, but an Officer appointed by the King and State touching Church-matters, he is under Law to God, and to the King and State: If he enjoin or forbid us any thing contrary to Law, we owe him no Obedience. Our Oath to him binds us to no new Duty, but only binds us more strictly to do what we had been bound by the Law to do, in case we had not taken that Oath. The same supream Authority which makes the Ordinary, and gives him limited Power over us, doth declare in the Preamble of the late Act for Toleration, that the Liberty now enjoyed by the Nonconformists, *may be an effectual means to unite their Majesties Protestant Subjects in Interest and Affection.* Now our hearing and joining with the Nonconformists, is a countenancing of them, and of their present Liberty, and consequently it tendeth to the union of Protestants in Interest and Affection, in the Judgment of the King and Queen, and of both Houses of Parliament, and consequently of the Ordinary himself; for by the Ordinary is meant the Bishop of the Diocese, who is one of the House of Lords, and so hath a hand in making the Law. How can we disobey the Bishop by hearing and joining with those Men, unto whom the Bishop himself, as a Member of the House of Lords, doth by his consent to the Act of Parliament, give free Liberty, as an effectual means of uniting Protestants in Interest and Affection, and exempteth them from all Penalties, and from being prosecuted in any Ecclesiastical Court, for or by reason of nonconforming to the Church of England?

Obj. 5. The Nonconformists are against all Church-Government by Bishops, and there can be no Church without a Bishop. *Ans.* The Nonconformists are not against all Church-Government by Bishops, for they have long desired that famous Arch-bishop *Usher's* Model of Church-Government by Bishops and Presbyters might be established among us. But hitherto they could not obtain it, for there are a party of Men in the Nation, some Clergy and some Laity, by Profession Protestants, whom the Piety and moderation of such Bishops as Bishop *Usher* and Bishop *Hall*, doth greatly offend, and can by no means please. A limited Episcopacy the

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Nonconformists generally are not against; try and see if they will not accept and willingly conform to Arch-bishop *Usher's* Model. That there may be a Church without a Bishop is plain from the Dutch, Helvetian, Protestant French Churches, and those in *New-England*. There is also the universal Church on Earth, and yet no one universal Pastor and Bishop on Earth. The Pope indeed claims to be so, but for that he is by Protestants justly charged with Antichristian Pride and Ambition. There is also the Church of *England*, as comprizing all the Christian People in *England*; but no one Man is universal Bishop to all the Christian People in *England*, nor are all the Bishops put together Governours of the Church of *England*, but they are subject to the King and Queen, and governed by Laws, made by the King and Parliament, as hath been declared: and therefore it is not true, that there can be no Church without a Bishop. The Church consisteth by Christian Faith, Hope, and Love, not as exclusive of Pastors and Ministers, but as supposing and including them as God's Instruments for begetting and finishing these heavenly Graces: and nothing hinders but that able and faithful Presbyters may be instrumental in God's Hands for begetting and finishing these heavenly Graces in thousands of Souls, yea and much better than some Bishops; such as either cannot or will not labour in the Word and Doctrine, Popish Bishops, who are Idolaters, and such other as seek themselves and not the things of God.

Obj. 6. The Nonconformists have no Ceremonies in their way of Worship. *Ans.* Yes, but they have two Ceremonies of God's own ordaining, Baptism, and the Institution of Bread and Wine; and if God had not thought these two enough, he could easily have ordained more; but he thought good to ordain no more, and it must needs be a wise and safe way to keep to God's Ordinance.

Obj. 7. The Nonconformists have no publick Liturgy, that is, no stinted form of publick Prayer and Administration of Sacraments. *Ans.* You will give the Minister leave to chuse his Text, and compose and methodize his Sermon; why can you not also leave him to perform the other part of ministerial Office, respecting Prayer, Thanksgiving, and the Sacraments, by a stinted form or not, as he himself is best able and thinks most meet? If his Words be grave, sound, scriptural, pious, suited to common Edification, though not to each ones Fancy, your Duty is to mind your Heart, to purify that from Pride and carnal Prejudice, and evil Thoughts, and affectionately to concur and join in all the Service, and be thankful. It is very desirable that all Ministers were of such Abilities, and at all times so prompt and full, as to need no stinted Form in publick; let those who are so able, not be abridged of their Liberty beyond their own choice and Christian Prudence. The Nonconformists keep to Christ's own Words
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in the Act of Baptism, and they recite the Words of Christ touching the Lord's Supper, and they keep to a stinted Form in Singing Psalms, and they read God's own Word in their Assemblies; and if they be able to preach they are able to pray, and to suit their Prayer to the Edification of that People over whom they are set, and to whom they minister. And therefore this can be no just Exception; they think they have much more reason to except against our way as being too much in stinted Forms.

Obj. 8. We who are Conformists cannot hear and join with the Nonconformists without condemning our own way. *Ans.* It doth not follow that because our Way is good, therefore their Way is not good; for as to external Modes and Forms and Things circumstantial Sister-Churches, and Neighbour Congregations may differ, and yet both be good and lawful. Twenty Ministers at the same time in distant Congregations may hit upon the same Text, and deliver the same substantial Doctrine, and yet their Words and Method and Composure may wonderfully vary, and all may be good and useful, and God more glorified by such Variety than otherwise. Most conforming Congregations have no Organs, some have; must therefore one of the two necessarily be bad and damnable? The Churches in *Holland*, the Churches in *Helvetia*, the Churches in *Geneva*, the Churches in *Denmark*, the Churches in *England*, the Protestant French Churches have different ways, and modes, and forms, as to external Worship. If one be good, must we therefore condemn all the rest as sinful? What is sinful and forbidden by God, we may in no wise conform to; but what is neither precisely commanded nor precisely forbidden by God, may be done or not done, according as Christian Prudence shall dictate to be most convenient: in such Cases and Matters we are after the Example of *Paul*, to be all things to all Men; and if we come to an Episcopal Church, do as they do; if we come to a Presbyterian Church, do as they do, according as *Ambrose* advised *Augustine*; *Ad quamcunque ecclesiam veneris, ejus morem serva, si, &c.* To what Church soever thou shalt come, observe its way and manner, if thou wouldst neither offend others, nor have others to offend thee.

Obj. 9. If the Nonconformists will preach in the Church, I will readily hear them; but to hear them in Barns and private Houses, and the like places, I like not, I am against it. *Ans.* We cannot follow a better Pattern than Christ: Now he preached not only in the Temple and Synagogue, but in private Houses, and sometimes upon a Mountain, and by the Sea-side out of a Ship, the People standing upon the Shore; and he never declined Preaching to more or fewer in any convenient place suitable to the Occasion. The places in which the Nonconformists preach, some of them are goodly Edifices, some of them are publick Chappels, the meanest of them are not naturally indecent, they best suit with their Circumstances; and God being graciously present with them, the places where they assemble must needs be the *House of God*, and the *Gate of Heaven*, Gen. 28. 10, to 18. Get them free leave to exercise their Ministry in the Churches, and they will willingly quit their Barns and other

other places; but if you exclude them from the Churches, you necessitate them to preach in other places; and by valuing the Word for the sake of the Place, rather than the Place for the sake of the Word, you declare that indeed you do not truly value God's Word. As it was no shame to Christ to be born in a Stable, nor to his Virgin-Mother, because it was not their Sin but their Calamity, but all the Shame was to those that thrust them into the Stable: so it is no Shame for God's Ministers and People to worship him in a Barn, when they have no fitter Place to worship him in; but the Shame is to those that might allow them better Places to worship God in, and will not, but thrust them into a Barn, and then make that a Cloak for their not hearing and joining with them.

Obj. 10. There is no need of the Nonconformists Preaching, it doth more hurt than good, it may better be spared, the Conformist Ministers are full enow for the People of this Land. *Ans.* I confess that if all Places throughout the Nation were supplied by able and faithful Conforming Ministers, as some are, there would not be such need of the Nonconformists Preaching as now there is; but it is manifest to all discerning and impartial Christians, that though there is no want of Ministers, yet there is great need of able, holy, powerful, painful and exemplary Ministers in all the Diocesses of England; and pious Conformists and Nonconformists Ministers have need of each others Labours, and the more humble and faithful they are, the more sensible of it. Never to this day did the Church over-abound with able and faithful Preachers, nor will to the end of the World, while the Followers of Cain and Abel remain in the World, and many are called but few chosen. Good Bishop Hall would use to say, You may as well complain of too many Stars in the Firmament, as of too many good Preachers in a County.

Obj. 11. The late Act for Toleration doth only tolerate the Nonconformist Meetings, it doth not approve them. *Ans.* It is plain from the Preamble of the Act, that it permits them as an effectual means to unite their Majesties Protestant Subjects in Interest and Affection; and therefore it must needs approve them. For nothing that is not good and laudable, and worthy to be approved, can be an effectual means of uniting Protestants in Interest and Affection; so that the Nonconformists have as true Right to their places by the Law of the Land, as the Conformists have to theirs, they are both alike under their Majesties Protection, and do alike stand or fall with them and their Government; their Religion is one, they have the same common Enemy, and are like to be happy or miserable, strong or weak, according as they unite in God and their present Majesties, or do not unite.

Obj. 12. The Presbyterian Meetings are not true visible Churches of Christ. *Ans.* The 19th Article of the Church of England declares, the visible Church of Christ to be a Congregation of faithful Men, in the which the pure Word of God is preached, and the Sacraments be duly ministered according to Christ's Ordinance, in all those things that of necessity are requisite to the same. Now the Presbyterian Meetings are visibly such Congregations, and therefore it is impossible that they should be heretical, schismatical, and lacking in any thing necessary to the being of true visible Churches of Christ. If we deny them to be true visible Churches of Christ, we shall not be able to prove the Conformist Churches, true visible Churches of Christ; for my part I am not able, and I despair to see it solidly and scripturally proved by any other.

Obj. 13. Conforming and Nonconforming Churches are contradictorily opposite, as Light and Darkness, Christ and Belial, Heaven and Hell, and therefore both cannot be true Churches. *Ans.* Such as conform to God's Word, and such as do not conform to God's Word in the Substance and Foundation of Religion, are contradictorily opposite, as Heaven and Hell, the Church of God and the Synagogue of Satan; but they who equally conform to God's Law in the Substance and Foundation of Religion, and differ but about circumstantial things enjoined by Man's Law, though really and for the main they be both Conformists, yet verbally and secundum quid they differ as Conformists and Nonconformists; therefore the grand difference is not between Conforming and Nonconforming Protestants, but between god-

ly and ungodly Protestants, whether Conformists or Nonconformists. As for godly Men Conformists and Nonconformists, they can bear with one another, and rejoice in each others Labours, and sincerely though not perfectly deny themselves, and mind and seek the things of Christ, and advance his Kingdom; but it is unregenerate, ungodly, Self-seeking, Saint-hating, sensual and worldly Men, whether Conformists or Nonconformists, that are the Plague of the Church, and Satan's chief Agents.

Obj. 14. It is fitter that the Nonconformists come over to us than we to them, we by yielding to them shall harden them in their sinful Nonconformity, and shall displease our own side, and not gain our Enemy. *Ans.* Be it supposed that Nonconformity is a Sin, will it therefore follow that we are not to do our Duty to God and them, and all that in us lies seek the Peace of the Church and the Publick Good? Rigid Conformists confess the Points scrupled by Nonconformists, to be in their own nature indifferent, neither commanded nor forbidden by God, and that the Church may well be without them: Moderate Conformists confess the Church might better be without them, if all both Rulers and People could be so content: but Nonconformists judg some of the things to be flatly sinful. Now on whom doth it lie to yield? They retaining their own Principles, cannot yield and come over to us; we retaining our own Principles, may come over to them, and join with them in the Word, and Prayer, and Sacraments, as we have Call and Opportunity; and in so doing, we gain them so far as it lies in us to gain them, we please God, which is Motive sufficient, and cannot but have a good end and effect. If they make an ill use of our Condescension, that is their Sin, for which they must answer to God, who will not fail to accept and reward our good Deed: and if Conformists be displeased with us for doing our duty, shall we therefore desist from it? The question is not, whether they sin in not conforming? but allowing to each other their different Thoughts and Opinions about Conformity, what is the duty of both sides as to mutual Peace and Concord? They are so prudent as in the course of their Ministry to insist upon those Points in which both sides agree, as being sufficient for Edification; and therefore we may safely join with them in publick Church-duties as we have occasion, without receding from our own Principles, without breaking any Law divine or humane: and therefore it will lie at our door if we do not; we sin against one Article of Faith, *The Communion of Saints*.

Obj. 15. Can you give an instance and example of what you press and exhort to? *Ans.* Yes, a famous one recorded in the Harmony of Confessions of three Parties of Protestants in Poland, some following the Augustan Confession, some following the Helvetian Confession, and some following the Bohemian Confession; and being sensible of the evil and sad effects of their Divisions, the leading Men of each Party came to an Agreement as to Doctrine and Points of Faith, and permitted to one another diversity in Rites and external Modes, and so became one, and did preach, and pray, and communicate with one another, and did greatly flourish in the midst of Popish Adversaries and Arian Hereticks, and Enemies of all sorts. See for this *Corpus Confess.* par. 1. pag. 163. par. 2. pag. 215. *Paras brevic.* cap. 17.

Let us remember the Day of Judgment, lovingly converse without Protestant Brethren, not be strange to them, serve them in Love; rejoice that Christ is preached, Souls saved and edified, and Satan confounded by the Ministry of Protestant Conformists and Nonconformists. Long for the good Day when all Sect-names shall be abolished, and till that can be, let us really and indeed be one in Love; embrace the Nonconformists as dear Brethren in Christ, make them freely welcome to preach in our Pulpits, encourage our People to hear them, and hear and join with them our selves as we have Opportunity, and thank them for their Labours, and wish them all good Success; and extend our Charity to such of them as need, and in all things conform our selves to the Example of Christ. To him be Glory for ever. *Amn.*

